CHAPTER I

TRADITION OF INDIAN POETRY IN ENGLISH BEFORE 1960
The history of Indian poetry in English goes back to the year 1827 when Henry Derozio published his first book of verse called Poems. His poetic career was very brief, lasting only for about six years from 1825 to 1831. His first book Poems (1827), was followed by The Fakir of Junghera: A Metrical Tale and other poems (1828). He was a patriotic poet whose poems such as 'To India', 'My Native Land' and 'The Harp of India' were inspired by an intense love for the motherland.

Kashi Prasad Ghose published his first book of verse, The Shair and Other Poems in 1830. He was followed by Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Toru Dutt and Manmohan Ghose. Madhusudan Dutt's The Captive Lady (1849), Toru Dutt's Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan and Manmohan Ghose's Love Songs and Elegies may seem dated today but they are milestones of Indian Poetry in English, which the posterity will not willingly let die. The historical importance of these books can never be denied.

Derozio is the first Indian Poet in English who not only inculcated a spirit of patriotism but influenced other Indian poets in English. His student Kashi Prasad Ghose's The Shair and other poems is deeply influenced
by Derozio's poetry. For example, his poem, "The Farewell Song" included in V.K. Gokak's The Golden Treasury of Indo-Anglian Poetry resembles Derozio's 'The Harp of India' and 'To India, My Native Land'.

Michael Madhusudan Dutt, while at the Hindu College (where Derozio taught) wrote a number of poems in English. In one of his Sonnets entitled, 'Sonnet written at the Hindu College', he shared the optimism expressed by Derozio in his famous poem, "Sonnet to the Pupils of the Hindu College'. Dutt later wrote a long poem "King Porus - A Legend of Old", the closing lines of which remind us of Derozio's well known poem, 'To India, My Native Land' in which the latter laments the loss of past glory. Dutt's The Captive Ladie - a narrative poem on the Rajput princess Sanjukta carried off by Prithviraj was published in 1849. It has two cantos and is written in Octosyllabic lines with rhyming.

It is evident from the works of Derozio, Ghose and Dutt that they are written in the manner of Byron and Walter Scott. These works are largely imitative and derivative. Professor V.K. Gokak is right when he says that, "Indo-Anglian poetry was born under a Romantic Star. It learned to lisp in the manner of Byron and Scott in the verse of Derozio, M.M. Dutt and others. It began with verse romances and lyrics written in the Romantic vein".¹

This happened before the upsurge of nationalism. Soon there was some kind of a re-thinking. Michael Madhusudan Dutt switched over to Bengali and gave a call
to the fellow-poets which has become proverbial: 'Let those who feel they have springs of fresh thought in them fly to their mother tongue'. Added to this are the admonitions of Edmund Gosse and W.B.Yeats urging the poets to write about the real India and that too in their mother tongue. Indian poets in English got disheartened and turned to their mother tongue. However, some of our talented and determined Indian poets in English like Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu and Sri Aurobindo did not pay heed to foreign advice and wrote poetry in English (I exclude Rabindranath Tagore from this group because he wrote only one poem 'The Child' in English).

Toru Dutt is the first Indian poet in English to present ancient legends and stories in English. In a way, she has given a 'local habitation and a name' to Indian poetry in English through her ballads and songs. Toru, a Hindu convert to Christianity together with her sister Aru, published an English version of French poems in 1875 under the title, 'A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields' which attracted the attention of Edmund Gosse. Gosse was full of praise for her. He even went on to say that, 'there is sure to be a page for this tragic, exotic blossom of song in the history of English literature'. This prophesy was unfortunately belied. However, Toru's name is written in golden letters in the history of Indian poetry in English. Edmund Gosse was kind enough to contribute a generous introduction to her second collection of poems,
Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan, which had gone to three editions in succession, the third one by Kegan Paul, Trench and Co., London. In this poem, she aims at re-telling some of the famous Indian legends in English verse - the legends of Savitri who won back the soul of her dead husband from Yama, the god of Death or the episode of Sita's wilfulness from the Ramayana. She is a very successful story-teller and when she tells about Savitri, Dhruva, Prahalad and Lakshman, she takes the readers with her. Let us consider the opening lines of 'Savitri'.

Savitri was the only child
of Madra's wife and mighty kind,
Stern warriors, when they saw her, smiled,
As mountains smile to see the spring.

All the qualities - narrative, reflective, nostalgic and dramatic are fully developed. She reveals a very rare insight when she dives deep into a complex character like Narad Muni. She has grasped the legend very correctly and thus says:

No god in heaven, nor king on earth,
But Narad knew his history -
The Sun's, the moon's, the planet's birth
Was not to him a mystery.

Besides legends, Indian nature also fascinated her she speaks very poignantly of her response to the garden house in Calcutta, as the lines in 'Sonnet-Baugmaree':

The light-green graceful tamarinds abound
Amid the mango clouds of green profound,
And Palms arise, like pillars grey, between,
And over the quiet pools the seemuls lean,
Red, -red, and startling like a trumpet's sound.
Toru's understanding of Folk element is superb and for the successful realisation of it let us read the first four lines of "Jogadhya Uma" where there is a fine fusion of words, syntax and rhythm in the street cry of the bangle-seller. The distinct Indian sensibility pervades the poem:

Shell-bracelets ho! Shell-bracelets ho!
Fair maids and matrons come and buy!
Along the road, in morning's glow,
The pedlar raised his wonted cry.

'Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan', according to C.D. Narasimhaiah, 'will continue to be read as children's classic'. Toru's celebrated poem, 'The Casuarina Tree' combines her love of nature with tender evocation of childhood is by now turns out to be a minor classic.

Through the Casuarina tree Toru harks back to her childhood:

But not because of its magnificence
Dear is the Casuarina to my soul;
Beneath it we have played, though years may roll,
O Sweet companions, loved with love intense,
For your sakes shall the tree be ever dear!

Her little known Sonnet 'Lotus', though influenced by William Cowper, is decidedly an improvement upon him. Toru, without doubt, is the first Indo-English poet whose position may be regarded analogous to that of Chaucer in English poetry. Her untimely death gave a blow to Indo-English poetry. Even then the works she had created within this short span of life will sing her story and she will live in them.

Manmohan Ghose came at the end of the last century. Laurence Binyon in his Introduction to Ghose's Songs of Love and Death (Oxford, 1926) wrote: "His verse follows the forms and traditions of English poetry, but his
temperament and attitude were Eastern. ... Mentally he was torn in two:" (PP.16-17). Binyon further went on to say that 'No Indian has ever before used our tongue with so poetic a touch, and he would coin a phrase, turn a noun into a verb with the freedom, often the felicity, of our own poets' (P.21). Ghose's 'Love Songs and Elegies' appeared in 1898 and by that time he had returned home. Misfortunes fell on him in quick succession. His wife fell ill and died. He went blind in 1918. He felt the pinch of isolation and alienation from Indian people. Thus in 'Songs of Love and Death' he wrote: 'Green things are indeed wonderful here, but brown things (that is, man !) are absurdly out of sympathy with me, at least socially .... denationalised that is their (the Indians) word for me' (P.18). Love of his wife and grief at her death inspired a group of lyric poems in 'Immortal Eve' and 'Orphic Mysteries'. One finds the echoes of Tennyson's 'In Memoriam' in 'Immortal Eve'. Ghose calls the lyrics of this series, 'Songs of the Triumph and Mystery of Beauty'. Similarly 'Orphic Mysteries' is a series of separate poems on the theme of the death of his wife which reminds us of 'In Memoriam'. The theme is amply borne out in one of the poems:

Sorrow, heavenly sorrow!
Wake thou in my breast,
It is to rouse thee with the cold grey morrow
Melancholy, as thou springest in the east. (P.109)

'Lines' a poem in the series, where love brings a kind of solace to the grief-sticken heart reads:
Vividly but for a moment
The air with her is sweet
Across Time's angry comment
Her eyes and my eyes meet. (P.120)

Ghose's 'Late Lyrics' contains a few songs of spring and autumn in India but the mood and even the scenery is English. In a poem called, 'On the centenary of the Presidency College' (1917), Ghose salutes the joint Indo-British founders of Presidency College. Thus Ghose's uniqueness lies in being both Indian and English.

Michael Madhusudan Dutt, in spite of his imitation of Byron, was a gifted poet. He published poems in Blackwoods Magazine dedicating them to William Wordsworth. His well known narrative poem, 'The Captive Ladie' appeared in Madras in 1849 and like Derozio's 'Fakir' revealed the influence of the English romantics, especially Byron. 'The Captive Ladie' deals with the story of the Rajput Princess Sanjukta carried off by Prithviraj, the most romantically heroic figure in Rajput history. The poem describes the primeval innocence, the temptation of Man and his Fall in the form of visions. The blank verse is fairly good. He emulates Milton but never rises to the heights of originality. Michael Madhusudan Dutt switched over to Bengali from English for obvious reasons and became the first modern Bengali poet. His advice to fellow poets to write in their mother tongue has been, as subsequent developments in Indian poetry in English show, more honoured in breach than in observance.

Sarojini Naidu was a born poet and poetry was in her blood. Giving an account of how she began writing poems,
she said, "One day when I was eleven, I was sighing over a sum in Algebra, it would not come right; but instead a whole poem came to me suddenly, I wrote it down. From that day my 'poetic career' began. At thirteen I wrote a long poem, 'a La' - 'The Lady of the Lake' - 1300 lines in six days. At thirteen, I wrote a drama of 2000 lines, a full-fledged passionate thing that I began on the spur of the moment, without forethought - just to spite my doctor, who said I was very ill and must not touch a book." She wrote four volumes of verse: The Golden Threshold, (1905), the first volume which has been dedicated to Edmund Gosse, (for he showed her the way to the Golden Threshold), The Bird of Time (1912), The Broken Wing (1917) and the Posthumous The Feather of Dawn.

Sarojini Naidu (when she was at King's College, London, and Griton, Cambridge) came in contact with poets and critics such as Arthur Symons, Edmund Gosse and the Rhymers' Club. Arthur Symons, we are told, admired Sarojini's 'maturity of mind at seventeen' and had never known anyone exist on such 'large draughts of intellectual day' as this child of seventeen, to whom 'one could tell all one's personal troubles and agitations as to a wise old woman'. She was a poet of passion and emotion with a lyrical bent of mind. Edmund Gosse was greatly impressed by her poetry and finding it too English he advised her to make poetry out of some revelation of India, some penetrating analysis of the native passion, the principles
of antique religion, and of such mysterious intimations
as stirred the soul of the East. Sarojini Naidu had the
aspiration to become a poet of all ages to come and 'hoped
to be a Goethe or Keats' for her country, and it was her
earnest desire to write poetry - 'one poem, one line of
enduring verse even'. She wrote Symons to say: 'I am not
a poet really, I have the vision and desire, but not the
voice, but I sing just as the birds do and my songs are
ephemeral'. If her songs are ephemeral or appear to be
so, it is because she did not work on her poems or stopped
writing well before she was thirty.

As a poet she is what W.B.Yeats called her a 'pure
romantic'. Her poetry is full of poignant feelings and
picturesque Indian imagery. Her poems defy exact classi­
fication: Folk Songs, Love lyrics, Songs of Spring and
Poems of Life and Death - a few memorable poems on India
like 'Indian Dancers', 'The Indian Gipsy', 'The Queen's
Rival', 'Nightfall in the city of Hyderabad', 'To India'
and 'Guerdan'. Thus she wrote on a number of themes but
the theme she had made peculiarly her own, the one in
which she appears to be least imitative, is what we may
call the folk-theme. 'The Palańquin Bearers' is an out­
standing folk song. It is lively and full of lyricism:

Lightly, 0 lightly, we bear her along,
She sways like a flower in the wind of our song;
She skims like a bird on the foam of a stream
She floats like a laugh from the lips of a dream.

The rhythm should be enjoyed in the complex context of
the Palańquin-bearers' accomplished 'Springy foot work',
the atmosphere of highbred courtly passion, and an
exquisite tenderness;
Softly, O softly we bear her along,
She hangs like a star in the dew of our song.

Her themes are timeless: Love, Life and Death. Thus the
wandering singers declare:

Our lays are cities whose lustre is shed
The laughter and beauty of women long dead;
The sword of old battles, the crown of old kings.
And happy and simple and sorrowful things

'Happy and simple and sorrowful things' - these are what
her songs were mostly about. In poems like 'Corn Grinders',
'Indian Weavers', 'Festival of Serpents', 'Song of Radha
the Milk Maid' and 'Leile', where she keeps her emotion
somewhat tidy, her sentiment genuine to the folk songs
of South India, she succeeds marvellously. Let us take the
following two lines from 'Leile' where the scene is set
in an evening inducing an atmosphere of stillness:

A Caste-mark on the azure brows of heaven
The golden moon burns sacred, solemn, bright.

To speak of moon as a caste-mark on the forehead of
heavens is in itself a work of daring imagination. J.H.
Cousins is so impressed by this image as to remark that
'the image lifts India to the literary heavens, it
threatens the throne of Diana of the classics, it
relieves Luna from the work of asylum-keeper and gives
her instead the office of the remembrancer that the
Divine is imprinted on the open face of Nature'.

A complete picture of life and man's happiness and sorrow
on earth is visualised in "Indian Weavers" that arrests
our attention. As C.D.Narasimhaiah has rightly pointed
out that 'the Hindu Trinity is quite firmly impressed on
Sarojini's mind and the poet gives convincing proof of
the intimate knowledge of her own tradition with surprising economy and sharpness of touch; the weavers are Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, each taking a stanza unto himself. 'Buddha seated on a Lotus' has been included in the "Oxford Book of English Mystic Verse" where the poet thinks of heaven and sums up the philosophy of the Vedanta as follows:

And all our mortal moments are
A session of the infinite.

Sarojini Naidu was very fond of songs and in a poem like 'The Song of Radha, the Milk Maid' she captured 'the very tone of voice of the milkmaid, the chanting rhythm, and the evocative power of the name, Govinda, Govinda, as she carried her curds, her pots and the gift of her inner self to the shrine of Mathura. The full-throated ease of the devotee's song manifests itself in the free flow of the verse:

When the bees grew loud and the days grew long
And the peach groves thrilled to the Oriole's song

That is how Sarojini Naidu can claim

'Well conquer the sorrow of life with the sorrow of song'.

In 'The Flute-player of Brindabun' Sarojini Naidu's heart is thrilled to the unfathomable mysteries of the Infinite:

Still must I like a homeless bird
Wander, for sake all;
The earthly loves and worldly lures
That held my life in thrall,
And follow, follow, answering
The magical flute-call.

'The Temple: A Pilgrimage of Love' is the title given to a constellation of twenty-four love poems that significantly form a group at the end of The Broken Wing. It
is a trilogy of lyric sequences, each of eight poems. The hot-blooded sincerity of feeling that underlies these poems reveal a wider dramatic range than the first impression suggests. The poems are strikingly witty and original. In the words of K.R.S.Iyenger, "The vicissitudes of the poet's pilgrimage of Love perplex us into awed attention. The glow, the surrender, the ecstasy, the recoil, the resentment, the despair, the reaction, the abasement, the acceptance - all are here.\textsuperscript{8} The first section of the trilogy describes love's early fulfilment and is named 'The Gate of Delight'. The eight poems in this section reveal a sensitive and passionate spirit - there is a peculiar blend of passion and thought, feeling and ratiocination which is the hallmark of these musical poems. And it may be mentioned that these poems could have been written only by a woman, brought up in the Hindu Way of life and in the traditions of Hindu love poetry, religious and secular. In her love poems, the beloved keeping Indian Hindu tradition, wants the dust under the feet of her lover which is meaningful in the context of Hindu religion. She nurtures in her 'wild heart' the 'memory's age-long dream' of her lover. The lover's 'foot-prints' are more dear to her than the 'scented lotus-wreath' and unlike ordinary women, she does not want 'pearls' but instead wants to be a part and parcel of her dear 'Love'. Thus she earnestly asks:

Grant me, Love, in priceless boon
All the sorrow of your years,
All the secret of your tears.

('The Feast')
With the tide of passion rising in her, impatient for the moment she will be his, she promises to come to the lover, if so called for, not leisurely but swifter than 'a trembling forest deer' or 'a panting dove', even swifter than 'a snake that flies to the charmer's thrall'. Thus in hyperbolic language she says:

If you call me, I will come
Swifter than desire,
Swifter than the lightning's feet
Shod with plumes of fire.

('If you call me')

In her imagination, the lover has become the 'temple of my Woe and bliss'. In her transcendental passion, the soul and sense are fused into one and she proudly declares:

All joy is centred in your kiss
You are the substance of my breath
And you the mystic pang of Death.

If the first section marks the early fulfilment of her love, the second section of the trilogy describes love's estrangement. There is a kind of 'self-pity' in "The Slayer". The beloved wants the lover to confess after her death that he has been the cause of her death. So the 'morning dew' in the garment of the lover would be regarded as 'death-drops' from her sad eyes and his robe splashed - vermilion vintage spilled - would be regarded as 'life drops of a heart' he has killed. But her pleadings are in vain, he is the 'slayer' and denied love, she is already dead -

They come, sweet maids and men with shining tribute
Garlands and gifts, cymbals and songs of praise
How can they know I have been dead, Beloved,
These many mournful days?

('The Secret')

He has crushed her soul under his feet, her heart has
been flung to serve wild dogs for meat, the tragic 'secret' of her life is that she is dead, although seemingly alive. The third section of the trilogy, 'The Sanctuary', attempts a kind of resurrection after the death described in the second section. A passionate devotion inspires this section and to the loving one her beloved seems more than a transient spark of flickering flame, since he kindles her darkness with immortal lustre, more than a common shell winnowed from the sea, since he makes audible to her the subtle murmurs of eternity. The last poem of this section is a sort of culmination of her earlier wishes to be completely identified with him. She is his and her body and soul both have become his, inseparable. They now sigh, 'one another's breath' and in a dramatic way she says that she has become an integral part of her lover to be treated in any way he likes. Now her 'flesh', 'blood' and 'heart' are his and he can feed his dogs on it, or water his garden with the 'blood' or turn it into ashes.

Sarojini Naidu's concept of love is based on Hindu religion and the beloved in the poem is like 'Sita' who tolerates everything and sometimes like 'Radha' sees her lover in everything. That is what makes her poetry lively and enjoyable. For her life is not a riddle to be solved but a song to be sung. While doing so, she does not spiritualize her and accepts the body unequivocally. In 'A Rajput Love Song' she passionately cries:

Come 0 tender night, with your sweet, consoling darkness,
And bring me my Beloved to the shelter of my breast!
If Sarojini Naidu is a Romantic, Sri Aurobindo is a mystic. Like his two predecessors, Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu, Sri Aurobindo too was Cambridge-educated but unlike them he had a wide knowledge of Greek, Latin, French and Italian, and profound scholarship in Sanskrit and English. Added to this is his mystic experience in jail, which made him to meditate in the seclusion of his ashram at Pondicherry. In the words of C.D. Narasimhaiah, "Like Conrad who broadened the descriptive range of the English language, it may be said of Sri Aurobindo that he made the English language accommodate certain hither to unknown (inconscient) areas of experience both through his prose work 'Life Divine' and through his epic 'Savitri' not to speak of the numerous translations from Sanskrit Poetry and drama as well as his other less known but important works. This is a gain to the English language somewhat inhibited by the western faith in verisimilitude".  
Sri Aurobindo's "The Life Divine" has been hailed as one of the seminal books of our century. Some of his other major works are 'The Human Cycle', 'The Ideal of Human Unity', 'Essays on the Gita' and 'The Synthesis of Yoga'. In the very first chapter of 'The Life Divine' Sri Aurobindo has said, "All problems of existence are essentially problems of harmony". Nothing human, or divine was alien to him.

With a yogic poise Sri Aurobindo writes in "The Bliss of Brahman" :
I am drunken with the glory of the Lord,
I am vanquished by the beauty of the Unborn;
I have looked alive upon the Eternal's face.
My body is cloven with His radiant sword,
My heart by His beatific touch is torn;
My life is a meteor-dust of His flaming grace.

This at once qualifies to be a part of any anthology of poetry written in English. As Sisir Kumar Ghose rightly observes that 'Sri Aurobindo as a poet of many dimensions, an amazing versatility, with an accent or ethos of his own, above all, as a poet of correlative vision, whereby one sees all explicit opposites as implicit allies', is 'truly a metaphysical poet'. To use the poet's own words about himself, 'He explores the ceaseless miracle of himself'. Poetry, according to him, does not depend on the individual power of vision of the poet, but on the mind of his age and his country, its level of thought and experience, the adequacy of its symbols, the depth of its spiritual attainment.

I don't claim that all the 24,000 lines of this epic are of richness and supreme poetry. What I suggest is that there are passages in it which by any standard qualify to be poetry. Let us consider the opening lines of the epic, with the title, 'The Dawn':

It was the hour before the Gods awake.
Across the path of the divine Event
The huge foreboding mind of Night alone
In her unlit temple of eternity,
Lay stretched immobile upon silence's marge.

Almost one fell, opaque, impenetrable,
In the Sombre symbol of her eyeless muse
The abyss of the unbodied Infinite,
A fathomless zero occupied the world.
Time and Space having been presented, the mind in its journey is caught up in 'the unlit temple' and is 'immobile'. It is eternity where the dawn and darkness co-exist. It will be appropriate to recall what Sri Aurobindo claimed for himself in Savitri: 'I am not seeking for originality but for truth and the effective poetical expression of my vision .... what I am trying to do everywhere in the poem, is to express exactly something seen something felt or something experienced'.

Mallarmé had suggested that it was the poet's business to purify the dialect of the tribe. Sri Aurobindo goes even a step further by purifying the consciousness of the tribe. Savitri is just not an epic which tells the story of a devoted Hindu wife who brought back her husband from the clutches of the god of Death, 'Yama', but a symbol of innocence and purity which triumphs over evil. This epic unmistakably vindicates the Indian Hindu ethos that the chastity and purity of a devoted wife is the greatest asset for her husband. No wonder that the epic heroine Savitri has attained godhood and is worshipped by Hindu wives in India. The story of this epic has a great emotional appeal for Indians. Aurobindo has given it a form and made this legend immortal. Even a fastidious critic like H.M. Williams speaks high of this poem:
“Nevertheless, it is a noble attempt to breathe new life of Indian metaphysics into a dead European form, and it has moments of high emotional intensity especially in Books IX, X and XI.”

This epic inspite of some drawbacks, remains to be the only epic written in English by an Indian in our time. Moreover, to write an epic in the twentieth century is no mean task. That Aurobindo succeeded in writing an epic in English in our century speaks volumes for his greatness as a poet. No less a Professor than Norman Jeffares has called Aurobindo the greatest Commonwealth poet of nineteenth century.

Independence brought changes of far-reaching consequences in various fields of our country. Not only social and political outlook of our people has undergone a change but there is also a kind of literary upheaval. More and more poets started writing poetry in English. Though the actual development of Indian English poetry took place in 1960s and after, quite a few volumes of poetry were published between our Independence (i.e. 1947) and 1960. Let us study these books briefly before we take up Indian poetry in English in 1960s in the second chapter.

After Independence Indian poetry in English took a dramatic turn. The natives got the necessary confidence to write poetry in English. The first modern Indo-English poet to publish a volume is Nissim Ezekiel. Ezekiel's
A Time to Change appeared in London in 1952. With this he broke new ground and Indo-English poetry took a different turn. In other words, it heralded the birth of modern Indo-English poetry. By 1960 Ezekiel had published four volumes of poems: A Time to Change, Sixty Poems, The Third and The Unfinished Man. In the beginning of his poetic career Ezekiel made a commitment to this country. He can be termed as a foreign native, who adopted himself to Indian landscape and situation. He has a thinking mind which takes things in their perspective. The influences of W.B.Yeats and T.S.Eliot guided him in the beginning of his poetic career but he was clever and talented enough to get rid of their shadows in the later volumes. In 'Background Casually' Ezekiel states his position unequivocally:

The Indian landscape sears my eyes
I have become a part of it
to be observed by foreigners

and then boldly asserts:

I have made my commitments now,
This is one: to stay where I am,
As others choose to give themselves
In some remote and backward place
My backward place is where I am.

Having made the commitments, he proceeded to depict different aspects of Indian life and began to understand and even appreciate the various Indian traditions and above all discovered his voice. This newly acquired voice dispels the echoes of Yeats and Eliot from Ezekiel's
poetry. 'Words obey his call' and he has the clarity of expression, precision of the subject matter and technical skill to write poetry of the first rank. In fact he did write good poetry. Consider 'Enterprise':

When finally we reached the place,
We hardly knew why we were there
The trip had darkened every face
Our deeds were neither great nor rare
Home is where we have to gather grace.

Here we have a very astounding use of the word 'gather' and its combination with 'Home'. Ezekiel uses words in such a perfect order that even puts the English poets to shame. The crystal clarity is the hallmark of his poetry. In 'A Time to Change' he writes:

To Own a Singing Voice and a talking voice,
A bit of land, a woman and a child or two,
Accommodated to their needs and changing moods
And patiently to build a life with these....
Is all the creed a man of God requires.

Ezekiel attaches a great deal of importance to the worldliness of the world, and its independence. He lays emphasis on humanism and in a poem called 'A poem of Dedication' Ezekiel says:

The image is created, try to change
Not to seek release but resolution,
Not to hanker for a wide, god-like range
Of thought, nor the metador's dexterity.
I do not want the Yogis concentration.
I do not want the perfect charity
of Saints nor the tyrant's endless power
I want a human balance humanly
Acquired, fruitful in the common hour....

One notices Eliotesque humility in his prayer, when he says:

Grant me the metaphor
To make it human good.
Here is an ideal worthy of actual as well as metaphorical attainment. In his first two volumes he successfully formed his poetic creed and made distinctions between a poem and poetry. In a poem entitled, 'Poetry' he says:

A poem is an episode, completed
In an hour or two but poetry
Is something more.
It is the why,
The how, the what, the flow...the residue
Is what you read, as a poem, the rest
Flows and is poetry.

Love and his attitude towards life colour his imagination and like W.B. Yeats he accepts both love and life.

In 'Day' Ezekiel observes:

And the loves of all the world
are drawn to my lips,
And the patience of mountains
is steadily in my eyes.

In an interview with Dr. John B. Beston Ezekiel said that "'The Unfinished Man' is my best book as a whole". Ezekiel is involved in guilt and the 'Primae Fall': 'Then suddenly the mark of Cain/Began to show on her and me'. Ezekiel has enough sympathy for his weak but well-intentioned persona:

The garden on the hill is cool,
Its hedges cut to look like birds
Or mythic beasts are still asleep.
His past is like a muddy pool
From which he can't hope for words,
The city wakes, where fame is cheap,
And he belongs, an active fool.

Ezekiel possesses a distinct Indian sensibility. As C. D. Narasimhaiah has rightly pointed out that 'the extent he has availed himself of the composite culture of India to which he belongs he must be said to be an important poet
not merely in the Indian context but in a consideration of those that are writing poetry anywhere in English. What distinguishes him from a crowd of versifiers is a genuine sophistication in the use of language born of fine insights into life. He sees life 'steadily' and seeing it 'whole'. In the first four volumes which he published by 1960, Ezekiel has been able to show a steady development in his poetic craft. His range is wide, and he dives deep into the subject and handles the poems with remarkable technical skill and achieves success and near perfection in them. So much so that he becomes a source of inspiration for a generation of younger Indo-English poets and almost all Indian poets in English look up to him for guidance and leadership.

Two anthologies of Indo-English appeared before 1960 - The Peacock Lute 1945, edited by V.N. Bhushan and Modern Indo Anglian Poetry: An Anthology 1959 edited by P. Lal and K. Raghavendra Rao. Bhushan's anthology contains the poems and biography of one hundred and seventy two versifiers. This is an elementary work and has only historical importance for it contains translations from regional languages into English. Most of the poets of this anthology are one poem poets and can safely be termed as Poetasters.

In an introduction to Modern Indo Anglian Poetry, Lal writes, "We think that poetry must deal in concrete terms with concrete experience - precise and lucidly and
tangibly expressed. It is better to suggest a sky by referring to circling eagle in it, than to say simply 'the wide and open sky'. As is evident Lal demands concrete immediacy and imagery that would make modern poetry do away with vagueness of earlier poetry. The poets of this anthology believe that English has proved to be adequate to express their native feelings in it. The break with the past is easily discernible in the language - the deliberate choice of words to keep the eye on the object. Eliot's ghosts haunt most of them including Mr. P.Lal. There is very little of Indian in the background and imagery: the rivers and mountains are all generalised, and 'international' flowers are preferred - roses, dahlias, not hibiscus and the talk about apples suggests the literary sources. The whole attitude is modern and that is why Krishna and Rama, household names in India, find no place here and even the great god Shiva, so Indian and still so alive, receives no more than a brief passing reference. Excepting a few genuine poets, the poets of this anthology are non-poets and their works shine in the reflected glory of English poets. In the choice of words (diction), in form, and in rhyming scheme they are total failures. The lines in their poems defy scanning and they have one thing in common - the desire to get their poetry published. In a word, this anthology, being one of the earliest, is lacking in standard. Nevertheless, this pioneering work helps to germinate confidence among the Indians to write poetry in English. Poets like Dom Moraes, Nissim
Ezekiel and P.Lal are signposts who continue to interest the reader and the critic alike. Inspite of its drawbacks this anthology stands as the first major anthology of Indo-English poetry.

After making a brief survey of Indian poetry in English before and upto 1960 I should pause for a moment to offer a few interpretations. V.K.Gokak's analysis of the poetry of this period, as he has done in his introduction to The Golden Treasury of Indo-Anglian Poetry one suspects, comes out of nationality bias or else how can one account for his classification of Indo-English poets of this period into two groups: 'neo-symbolists' and 'neo-modernists'? To him Sarojini is the Yeats of India and Sri Aurobindo a great innovation in the art of versification. Similarly, P.Lal and Raghavendra Rao though dismiss the old Indo-Anglian School of Poetry, represented by Tagore, Sarojini and Sri Aurobindo in an introduction to Modern Indo-Anglian Poetry 1959, 'We claim that the phase of Indo-Anglian momenticism ended with Sarojini Naidu', they have included in their anthology some poets whom we can't say poets even by courtesy. Thus there are two views running parallel and even counter to each other on Indo-English poetry of this period. One view representing critics like Gokak shower praise on it and the other maintained by Lal and Jussawala and critics of the like dismiss it summarily. To my mind, the truth lies in somewhere between these two views. The poets of this
period are imitative and derivative in their approach to life and use of diction. They never took liberty with the use of language and blindly followed the gentle English or the confessing Americans. Even in the use of their imagery they followed the English poets. Hence their poetry was neither here nor there. The native discarded it telling that it was written in an alien tongue and the English thought that it failed to project the real India and dipped in foreign sensibility. It suffered neglect in the hands of both Indians and the British. Our modern poets and critics now deem it a fashion to denounce the poets of this period with a view to playing their own poetry up.

But on a closer study one discerns a few poems by Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu and a large portion of Sri Aurobindo's Savitri quite satisfactory to evoke the reader's response and enable him to enjoy them. They are good poems by any standard and deserve to be preserved. Sri Aurobindo even used English language to his own advantage and exploited it fully. His mastery of the language can hardly be disputed. Wordsworth wrote a great deal of bad poetry but he is regarded as a major English Romantic poet on the basis of his few good poems. Why not adopt the same approach to Sri Aurobindo? In spite of the unevenness throughout the poem, Savitri stands out as a milestone in the field of Indo-English poetry and it may be remembered that it is the only epic in Indo-English literature. Love of the motherland and legends of the
country are the favourite subjects of the early Indian poets in English. They have expressed the spirit of the land and given vent to their Indian sensibility in the English language. Their poetry exhibits a love of the past, ancient myths instead of blindly imitating the English poets. Romance is native to the Indian mind and India has a great romantic tradition in ancient literature.

From the survey outlined above it is clear that Indian English poetry does have a tradition. From Henry Derozio to Sri Aurobindo there is a good deal of Indian poetry in English to fill the pages of a good anthology. Though the authenticity of this body of poetry is frequently challenged and the charges of imitativeness and derivativeness are levelled against it, the very existence of such poets as Derozio, Madhusudan Dutt, Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu and above all Sri Aurobindo can never be denied. Certainly the post-Independence Indian poets in English, particularly the poets of 1960s, did not descend from heaven. Even when they reacted against their predecessors, they were conscious of them. The tradition of Indian poetry in English, however weak it may be, is not a myth but a reality.
REFERENCES


11. ibid, P.56.

12. ibid, P.56.


17. ibid, P.62.

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